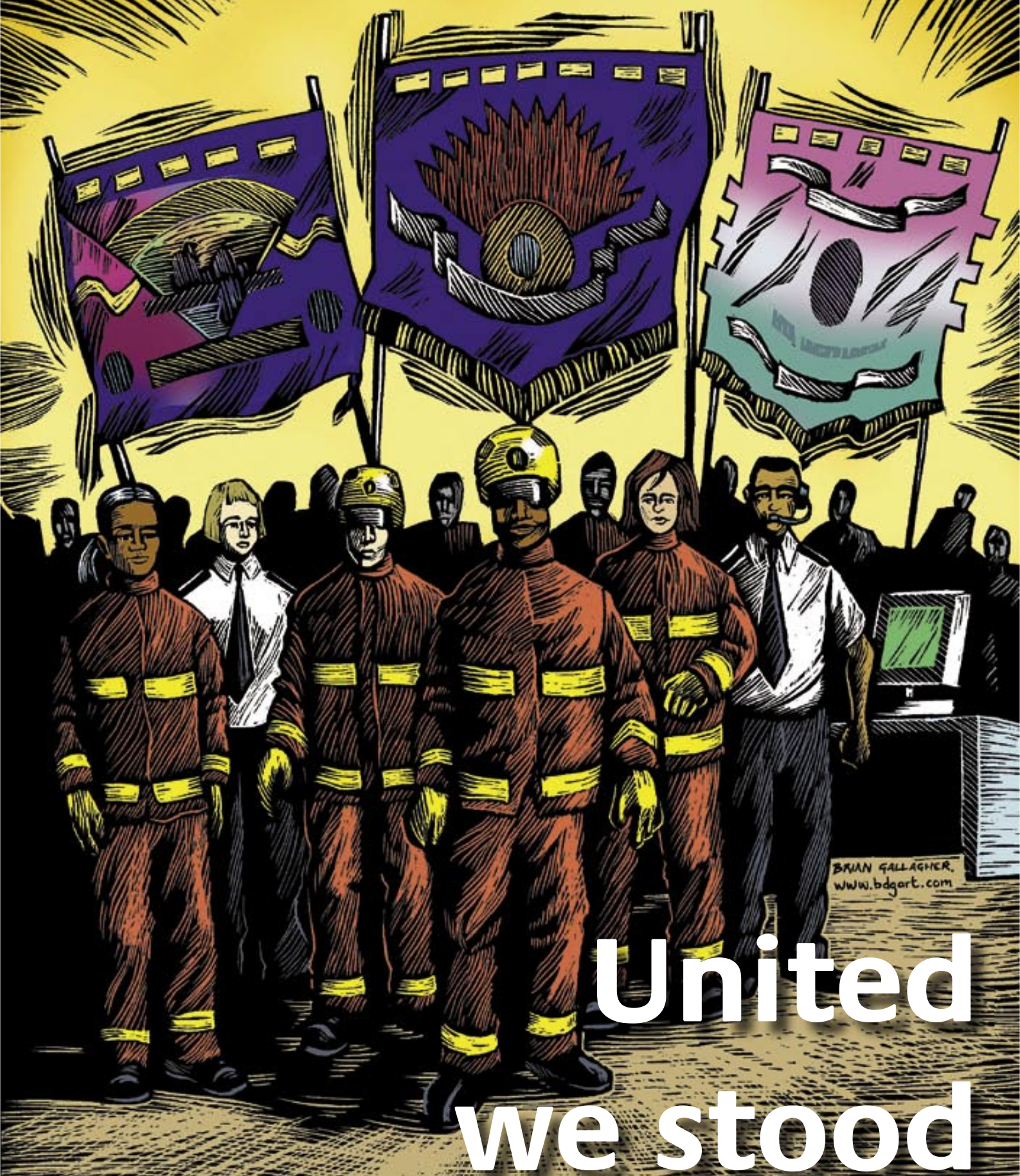




Volume 32 No. 7 September 2004

FIRE FIGHTER



BRIAN GALLAGHER
www.bdgart.com

United
we stood

EDITORIAL

The past looking to the future

WHAT became known as the “Fire Service Pay Dispute” is over. A negotiated agreement was reached with the National Employers on 26 August 2004, which provided for the full implementation of the pay increases due at Stages 2 and 3 of the June 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement.

The revised Grey Book, which was also part of the 2003 Agreement, comes into being, including all the details of the agreements in principle that were set out at that time.

Since the dispute started some two years ago, our members will have received three pay increases, which average 16% for “firefighter” members; 19.7% for Emergency Fire Control members and 23% for members working the Retained Duty System.

The Competent/Qualified Firefighter will be on a basic pay of £25,000, with provisions to increase those earnings. But the dispute was never simply about increasing basic pay.

The pay relationship between the emergency fire control staff – most of them women – and firefighters has increased from 92% to 95%.

Full pay parity has been achieved for firefighters working the Retained Duty System. This had been a principle we had sought for generations and it was achieved.

For pay increases due in July 2005 and July 2006, a new pay formula will ensure

that those increases fully reflect those in the Associate Professional and Technical pay classification of the UK economy. This link establishes the principle that we are professional workers and that our pay rises should reflect that position.

As the Union’s Assistant General Secretary, and having been a full time National Official for just over 25 years, I have found myself in unexpected territory over the last three months. Due to the illness of our General Secretary, Andy Gilchrist, I, under the rules of the Union, assumed the role of General Secretary.

This has meant that for the first time in those 25 years, amongst many other things, I have had the opportunity of writing the Firefighter Editorial. This is my second opportunity and I hope that with Andy due back, it will be my last.

It is an opportunity I do not intend to let pass without having my personal say on some of the things that have happened, and some of those that are still to come. Some may be offended by what I write; others may disagree, but I make no apologies.

I joined the fire service in 1966 on leaving school. I spent 13 years in Manchester and GMC and have now been a National Official of the Union for over 25 years. I have done the job at the firefighting end and I have had the honour and experience of a quarter of a century of the national “politics” of the



Assistant General Secretary Mike Fordham reflects on the dispute

service. A service, which I believed and still believe, is the greatest Fire Service in the world and the best public service in the UK.

I participated in one national fire strike and was part of the leadership of the one which has just ended. Were they justified? Yes they were.

Should they have been needed? Of course not!

The brutal reality of politics in this country is that unless those who work within the public services fight to defend both the service and pay and conditions, then the politicians ultimately responsible for them will not. This has been the case for as long as I remember.

This dispute over pay and conditions is now over, but the fight for our service will go on. Much work is to be done.

We need to fight to win the Fire and Rescue Service over to Zero Fire Deaths as its key driving target. We must



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dedicate more time and energy to our campaign to defend Emergency Fire Control staff.

We must work at waking the service up to the very real crisis of recruitment among retained members. And, as always, there will no doubt be countless local issues that we will have to tackle as we have always done.

We can only be successful in fighting the future battles if we maintain a strong and unified Union. I do not intend, (you will have to wait for the book!), to take the opportunity in this editorial to even attempt to write my version of the history of this dispute.

I do wish to comment on our Union; those who wish to destroy or weaken it, and my belief that we can instead, learn from events and, yes, the mistakes we made, to make us more unified and stronger than ever.

Assuming the full mantle of leadership over the last three months has given me an opportunity to both experience and assess the responsibilities that come with that position that even 22 years as a "deputy" cannot give. Our Union went into the dispute united (I hate that word, but I can't get City an obvious mention).

Despite the best efforts of some within Government, within the media and some within our Union, we are still strong and effective as the ballot and "implosion" of the National Employers has shown. Who would have believed that so soon after the last period of industrial action, we could, again, get an overwhelming YES vote in a high turnout ballot?

Be in no doubt, that is what was being achieved and the employers knew it. It is one of the reasons that drove them back to the negotiating table and helped

resolve the dispute.

There were those who wished to provoke a confrontation this time rather than a negotiated agreement. It is for them to examine their conscience, if they have access to one.

I would much rather praise those who stood up to those I described at the National Joint Council as the bullies, cowards and wreckers. We should recognise the stand taken by Christina Jebb, who was sacked as Chair of the National Employers because she was one of those prepared to honour an agreement reached with the help of the TUC.

We must also praise the employers' representatives from the Liberal Democrats, and councillors representing a range of political traditions across the UK and especially those from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales who withstood the bullying of the New Labour machine in London and who fought for a national agreement.

I have no doubt that those Local Government Association members representing the English Fire Authorities found the political pressure from Whitehall oppressive and threatening. But others stood up to the bullying and they should have had the courage and conviction to do so.

At the NJC on 2 August, the union exposed that bullying for others to deny, but no denial came. Now, having seen the minutes of the Employers' meeting, I understand why no denial was made – because we were telling the truth.

Despite that truth there were constant denials from Whitehall and the LGA until the whole sorry mess exploded in their faces for everyone to see. But the shambles created by the LGA was turned

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Brian
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EDITORIAL

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

into a crisis which showed everyone, including some of our members who may have been sceptical, what had been going on behind the scenes for two years.

I refer to "Whitehall", as I can only make presumptions at the sources of the pressure. I know who it was not. It was not the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott who intervened. How do I know? Because he told me and I believe him.

John Prescott said, as he did throughout the whole dispute, that he wanted a negotiated settlement. Not at any cost, true. YES he thought our original claim was mad, (his words not mine). Not so mad, it must be said, that it stopped the Cabinet from pocketing the 40% pay rise they had sought only the year before.

But in my view John Prescott wanted an honourable and negotiated settlement. There are others with the "Whitehall" tag who saw an opportunity to pursue a very different agenda and the National Employers gave them the own goal of the Bain Review to achieve it.

RUTHLESS PURSUIT

The underlying politics of our dispute from the Whitehall end was more about the relationship between Government and Local Government, rather than fair pay and a fair deal for our members. It was about the centralisation of the Fire Service and we have not even started to count the cost of their battle.

Nick Raynsford and Clive Norris, Minister and Civil Servant – perhaps or perhaps not – acting at the behest of Downing Street, have ruthlessly pursued their centralisation agenda and have been assisted by many at local level, including Brigade Managers. I cannot and will not forgive those who denigrated personally and professionally our membership and those who attacked those – both on the Employers as well as the trade union side – who were trying to reach negotiated agreements.

On at least three well-known occasions, interventions were made by Whitehall to prevent agreements being

reached, and on two of those, directly causing strike action to be taken. The Prime Minister may have been unable to find his weapons of mass destruction, but he certainly had his own weapons of mass disinformation.

I am sorry Mr Raynsford and Mr Norris, but you will never be fit to represent those you denigrated, and the public still have far more respect for our members than they will ever have for you.

How do I know? In a recent poll for a national newspaper, 94% of the public said firefighters could be trusted to do "a good professional job" – the highest in the poll and almost universal acclaim. Only 8% said they trusted politicians to do a good professional job.

And what of others who attacked us? The Government spin machine and the more despicable elements of the media?

Alastair Campbell was at the heart of that machine and the man in charge of the dogs they let loose on us during the original dispute. Let me quote former BBC boss Greg Dyke's description of Mr Campbell: "a deranged vindictive bastard" and "political thug".

That is what we were up against. Not people who sought the truth but those who wanted to contain, manage and control the truth and create something entirely different to launch their attacks.

And what of the media which relentlessly attacked us and the leadership of the union? Conrad Black's Sunday Telegraph was central to those attacks.

What of Lord Black and the Telegraph group's one-time editorial consultant Barbara Amiel (his wife). Let me quote the front page of the Financial Times of Wednesday 1 September: "Hollinger International yesterday blamed the insatiable greed and excessive lifestyle of Conrad Black and his wife Barbara Amiel Black, for transforming the newspaper publishing group the Canadian-born peer built and once controlled into a 'corporate kleptocracy'....

"The report provided investors and observers with new details about how the former Hollinger boss and David

Radler, a long-term colleague allegedly colluded to steal \$400 m (£233m) from Hollinger....

"The allegations span from relatively minor misuse of funds – including charging Hollinger \$42,870 for Lady Black's birthday party at La Grenouille in New York – to large scale fraud and tax avoidance".

That "relatively minor" amount for the FT is the annual pay (before tax) of most of you. If all this is true it shows the calibre of those who attacked us and our union.

The fire service, this union, our collective leadership and you our members are worth far more than the likes of Lord and Lady Black whether or not the allegations made against them are true.

AN AGREEMENT HONOURED (AT LAST)

Industrial relations, still the right words rather than Human Resource Management, will also be severely tested by the new environment in our service. The National Employers imploded on 2 August, but in fairness, went some way to rescuing the position three weeks later, when they honoured the agreement.

Negotiations have been difficult; they have been detailed; they have been lengthy; they have been professional on both sides, and an agreement was reached, despite the doubters and wreckers. The TUC, and particularly the General Secretary, Brendan Barber, has given tremendous personal backing to the achievement of a negotiated settlement, and his skills were invaluable. But he would be the first to acknowledge that agreement can only be reached by negotiation and yes ... compromise ... on both sides.

Our fellow trade unionists also backed the TUC and the FBU's efforts to find a negotiated agreement and their intervention was also invaluable. They knew, as we did, that the dispute was only ever going to be resolved by negotiation and compromise.

Those who believed or argued

differently are either naïve or incompetent. Why then do so many again wish to continue to denigrate the negotiators of both sides? The employers can make their own analysis and judgements. I do not intend to let the opportunity to pass in respect of our Union.

As I have said, we have many challenges ahead, all of which will affect all of our members, whatever role they have within our service. On the conditions front, we have all the challenges the framework within the Grey Book will throw up.

We have the new pay formula to implement and we need to agree the replacement for the LSI payment. We have a new development and training system and we have the challenge of ensuring the safety of the public and our members on the implementation of Risk Management in providing emergency cover.

We have a new legislative regime to providing a fire and rescue service and fire safety. We must have a service with equality at its core and where our service truly reflects the communities we serve.

We have a new national agreement, and as in 1977, only history will tell whether that agreement is to the benefit of our membership and our service. I believe it will be, and yes – I still believe our firefighters and emergency fire control staff members are worth £30K.

The Union's negotiators pursued the claim honestly – unanimously agreed by the Executive Council and unanimously endorsed by the Annual Conference in May 2002 – and to the best of their ability. They did so against the background of the most intensive and vicious campaign by a Government since the Miners' dispute of 1984.

DAMAGING INTERNAL ATTACKS

They also did so against a background of internal disunity, which was orchestrated by "politicos" within the Union. They are a group of people who exploited genuine concerns and fears amongst the

membership in an attempt at gaining political advantage and power for themselves.

This group did more damage than the denigration of Raynsford and Norris could ever do. The self-styled 30K website became the main political and tactical advisor to both Government and the National Employers.

The confidentiality of every tactical decision we made was exposed to Government and Employers. It was like trying to negotiate with both hands and feet tied.

Such actions gravely undermined the dispute at almost every turn. I cannot forgive those in Whitehall and the media who denigrated our members. And I cannot and will not forgive those within the union who, for their own political ends, wished to destroy the leadership of this union and in doing so, the justifiable claims made on your behalf.

It is significant how our unity held up so well in the last three months of the latest flare-up in the dispute once most of those "politicos" deserted the website.

As I have said, mistakes were made. It is not a world I know where mistakes are not made. But the true test is the motives behind decisions taken.

Throughout these two years, I have worked very closely with the General Secretary Andy Gilchrist and President Ruth Winters. To both of them, I say "thank you", not just personally, but on behalf of the Union as a whole.

Their commitment and absolute dedication to attaining the best possible agreement for our members cannot and should not be doubted. Ruth, as President, has an additional and important role – that of maintaining the proper relationship between the full-time officers and the Executive Council.

Officials at every level have strived over this period to maintain the strength and unity of the Union, whilst ensuring democratic accountability to the membership. I have witnessed in detail and at first hand the commitment and pressures on the Executive Council.

The EC does not deserve in any way

the opportunist attacks by the "politicos" and the spurious votes of no confidence that have been orchestrated. They have represented their members; they have done their best for them, and they will of course, be subject to democratic accountability through our ballot process.

It is interesting that the "politicos" to whom I refer – who are significantly London based – are open in their wish to replace every Region's Executive Council member, other than their own. That is an interesting take on democracy!

FRINGE POLITICAL AIMS

So what is their agenda? Their immediate aim – replace the leadership. Their route – initially personal attacks and if that doesn't work, by destroying the individual and their family – then the ballot box. Remarkably similar to the aims and tactics of both Whitehall and elements of the media which they claim to detest.

Their purpose, the pursuit of power and fringe political aims which no more than a handful of our members would support. It cannot be better conditions for our members – just look at their record both in undermining the dispute and within their own Brigades.

I have spent my life working to the best of my ability for our Union. My only aim has been to achieve the best for our members and our service. I had the opportunity in the last three months to assess in a way I never expected, the full responsibility of leadership.

Andy Gilchrist bore that responsibility throughout a much longer and more difficult time during the dispute. Andy was exposed to a hounding by our press, which no-one should have to endure.

More disgracefully, his family, including his two young children, were also exposed to it. So what "crime" was he guilty of?

Andy secured the unanimous agreement of his Executive Council and Conference for a pay claim; he secured the overwhelming YES vote in the 2002 ballot; he negotiated and pursued that claim unstintingly with the Employers;

EDITORIAL

PROFESSIONALISM

THE measure of our service is the professionalism of our members who work within it. I have spent much of my time as a National Official doing my best to enhance that professionalism through training initiatives, maintaining a National College, improved legislation for fire safety and of course, fire and emergency cover.

The “modern” fire service includes a new approach on much of this, the vast majority of it campaigned for by our Union over many years. To deliver it in addition to the skills

and dedication of our members, the service also needs leadership. Well, where is it, and where is it coming from? Where have our leaders, they are now officially Brigade Managers, been for the last two years specifically?

The Fire Service Inspectorate, do we have one still?

I am still waiting for the knight on a white charger to come over the horizon to save the Fire Service and solve the dispute. Honestly, I am not making it up. I was told it would happen.

There are those within the Inspectorate, or what is left of it, and some at Brigade Manager level, whom I both respect and believe can lead the “modern” Fire Service, but the requirements of managing without the “rank and braid” approach will expose others. They demanded conditions of service and fire cover provisions which allowed them to “manage”. Well, in some very important areas they now have them. Time will tell whether they are competent to truly manage. I have seen little evidence so far.

he received majority endorsement throughout the dispute from the membership. If the “crime” was doing his job and in doing so, taking on the Government and Employers, well then yes – he was guilty – guilty of pursuing his members’ interests.

I understand why and I know he does, the attacks from Government, Employers and Managers and the use of their organs like the Mail on Sunday and Sunday Telegraph. They hate effective trade union leaderships and what they stand for. They have always hated them and they always will.

The same media attacks other – mainly left-wing – union leaders. They would have attacked whoever was General Secretary of the FBU during the dispute. And when they were not attacking the leadership of the union they were attacking the service and everyone who works in it.

But what is indefensible is the attack on Andy and his family from the “politicos” within our own Union.

Four years ago, I stood against Andy for General Secretary. He spelt out in that democratic process what he stood for. He won, and he has done nothing other than pursue that agenda. When he is due for re-election he will do so with

my full support.

The future of our Union and our Service will be as much determined by the result of that election and other National elections as it will be by the negotiated outcome to the dispute and the new Government framework. Our “politicos” – representing a minority political view – and the media have the same agenda: destroying the leadership of the union.

Our members and officials at all levels have shown over the last three months what can be achieved when we are united and strong. The Fire and Rescue Service needs a strong FBU. Our members need a strong FBU.

To finish, I would like to thank all within our Union, members and officials

for their support and advice. I would like to thank our staff at Head Office, who have worked so hard to provide the services our members demand, including the insatiable demand for information.

We didn’t get everything right. There were no maps or guides to lead us through where we have been.

But we did our best in circumstances not faced by any other union in recent times. We told the truth and we acted with integrity and we will continue to do so.



Mike Fordham
Assistant General Secretary



P.S. To those officials who thought my C.A.G. (Canine Advisory Group) was just another sign I was losing the plot – here she is!!!

THE FBU is not the only organisation to have realised that Zero Fire Deaths should be the primary fire-related target for those charged with responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service.

A similar initiative is taking place in America, as detailed in the April 2004 Issue of the USA *Fire Rescue Magazine* ('Home Improvement – a new push to eliminate all deaths from residential fires by 2020').

The USA initiative is grounded in a partnership approach and has received a \$5 million (£2.8 million) one-time appropriation to fund the work, which includes research into wireless-linked domestic smoke detectors.

The FBU has been in contact with the USA to discuss similarities in the initiatives in the hope that both sides of the Atlantic can benefit from shared experience.

The Union first announced its intention to lobby for a target of Zero Fire Deaths in the summer of 2003 and then worked on a national strategy and training programme for its Officials until April 2004 when we formally launched the campaign in the Houses of Parliament.

A part of the FBU's initiative includes research into wireless domestic smoke detectors and alarms which can give occupants earlier warning of fire. The Union has publicly pledged £10,000 to kick start the research, on the understanding that other 'stakeholders' engage in a partnership approach to both the development and promotion of this type of detector as the 'standard' installation in all residential properties in the UK.

The Union has written an initial specification for such a detection system but recognises that success will ultimately be dictated by widespread promotion



Zero fire deaths policy in America

Rather than the initial reaction of writing off the FBU's Zero Fire Deaths initiative as fantasy, perhaps some of the other so-called stakeholders, who have been quick to criticise and belittle the Union's proposals, should look at what's going on in other parts of the world

of these devices by all fire and rescue service stakeholders in the UK. However, the FBU's proposal has to date received what can only be described as a 'cool' reception from many in the UK fire community, including some fire and rescue authorities.

Rather than the initial reaction of writing off the FBU's Zero Fire Deaths initiative as fantasy, perhaps some of the other so-called stakeholders, who have been quick to criticise and belittle the Union's proposals, should look at what's going on in other parts of the world. One thing they can be sure of – their lack of vision will not make the FBU's Zero Fire Deaths Campaign go away!

Log on to the FBU website at www.fbu.org.uk to buy NO₂ Fire Deaths clothing and to download the FBU's National IRMP Document.

CONTROLS CAMPAIGN

Fighting for you

This autumn the Union will be stepping up its efforts to defend the interests of Emergency Fire Control members, says Ruth Winters.



IN the two and a half years of the pay dispute there is one group of FBU members I have been particularly proud of and that is those from my own Section of Emergency Fire Control Staff.

I am proud because they have been at the forefront of every campaign this Union has ever run, proud because of the selfless approach they have had in their active support in all local and national strike action and proud of the dignified and determined way in which they conduct

themselves.

However my biggest accolade is that they do this, and have always done this, under the threat of Control Room closures, job cuts and an uncertain future. Therefore, this is a debt that all other members of this Union owe them and I'm sure that it is a debt that all other members of the Union will actively repay, as not to do so would be a tragedy for a Union who purports to be inclusive and socialist.

The most recent plans from Government on reducing 48 Controls to nine in England and Wales and from eight Controls to one in Scotland are shocking though predictable. They use London Control as an example and there's no surprise why. They are not within the same conditions of service. They are not members of the FBU. They have already merged from three Controls to one, and it doesn't take a genius to see where the influence lies in Government at the moment.

There is no doubt that there is frustration out there and even a belief that Emergency Fire Control Staff are going to be left to fight this on their own or just give up because it's inevitable.

That is most certainly not the view from Head Office. The campaign may not have the big bang approach or have been in the national press very often.

But I can assure you that we have been working in Parliament on the behalf of Emergency Fire Control Operators. The Control National Campaign Team have been up and running for many months.

We have representation on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Committee on Controls. Our website is up and running at www.controlcare.org.uk. When Parliament reopens we have plans for Regional lobbies of MPs. We have plans for campaign training in the Regions for Control Staff and Firefighters. We have plans for Regional visits from myself and the Assistant General Secretary as well as many other proactive campaigning ideas. Further suggestions, of course, are very welcome.

We are also very aware of the great work already done by some Regions in fighting this onslaught and we need that to spread and continue. What we must all realise is that this is not a campaign that will be won overnight. It is not a campaign that will all be won at once as different Regions and Brigades will have different timescales and priorities.

What I can tell you is that this Union still has a very clear policy of opposition to these plans, we are fighting and will continue fighting to stop them. There is no doubt that the pay campaign took up most of our time in Head Office but we can now look to other crucial campaigns.

I give our Emergency Fire Control Staff the commitment of the National Union to do all we can together, to stop this dangerous and despicable attack on our Emergency Fire Controls.

Ruth Winters is President of the FBU

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POLITICAL FUND

FBU members need a political voice. Politicians make decisions which affect the lives of FBU members at work and at home. The FBU needs to be able to influence those decisions. For that, the law says we need to have a separate Political Fund – if the Union wants to spend money campaigning on issues that have a political content.

Why we must keep our Political Fund

UNDER legislation introduced by the Conservatives in the 1980s, unions must hold a ballot of all their members every ten years to keep their Political Funds.

The FBU will therefore be holding a review ballot from 15th October to 12th November to confirm that members want to continue to keep the Political Fund.

Every member entitled to vote* will receive a ballot paper at their home address which needs to be returned by freepost to the independent scrutineer, who will oversee the conduct of the ballot.

WHY HAVE A POLITICAL FUND?

A Political Fund is vital to defend the rights we have already won and for us to be able to continue to influence political decisions. The Political Fund allows us to take our workplace campaigns into the political arena, campaign for FBU policies and have a say on changes in the law.

The Executive Council of the Union is therefore recommending that members vote YES in the forthcoming ballot.

WHAT THE FBU HAS WON USING THE POLITICAL FUND

Over the years, many of the laws, policies and public services which we now take for granted have been partly achieved by long, hard campaigning by trade unions – much of this campaigning has been paid for using Political Funds.

Trade union campaigning and political lobbying has helped win:

- Health and Safety legislation

- Legal rights to union recognition
- Information and consultation rights
- The National Minimum Wage
- Working Time Regulations
- Protection against Discrimination and Harassment
- Better Pensions
- More rights for parents at work.

Without a Political Fund, many current and future FBU campaigns – including 'NO2 Fire Deaths', Pay and Conditions and IRMP campaigns – would be seriously hampered.

DEFENDING MEMBERS' RIGHTS IN THE FUTURE

Today, the need to lobby and influence politicians in Westminster, Brussels and on local councils is even more central to protecting union members at work. With devolution creating a Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, the need for the FBU to campaign politically across the whole of the UK has never been more important.

FIGHTING WITH ONE HAND TIED BEHIND OUR BACK

If the FBU lost its Political Fund, much of our current campaigning would be put in jeopardy and some elements of it might even have to stop. That's why we need a resounding YES vote in the forthcoming ballot.

Ten years ago, in the last Political Fund Review Ballot, the FBU managed to secure a 85% YES vote on a 57% turn-out. We need to repeat that success!

* Out of Trade members are not entitled to vote.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON POLITICAL FUNDS

What is the Political Fund?

The law says that unions must have a separate Political Fund to spend on political campaigning. This could include a newspaper advertising campaign in support of public services, lobbying for better legal rights for workers, calling for increased investment in public services, holding a rally to improve health and safety protection or support for a political party. Members choose whether or not to contribute through a 'political levy'.

How much is the Political Levy?

63p per month or £7.50 per annum

Shouldn't unions concentrate on defending members' rights at work?

That's exactly what the FBU does – seeking wage improvements, negotiating better terms and conditions, defending jobs, representing members at legal, medical or disciplinary hearings. But the decisions and laws made by politicians affect members' interests at work. Members rely on decent public services and a healthy economy for their livelihood. So unions must be able to campaign in the political arena.

Who decides how the Fund is spent?

The elected Executive Council controls how the money is spent. The Executive is accountable to members through Conference and ensures that, when money is spent, a clear benefit can be seen for the union's members.

POLITICAL FUND

Why do we need a Political Fund now we are no longer affiliated to the Labour Party?

Only a small percentage of the Political Fund was previously used to affiliate to the Labour Party. The FBU still needs a Political Fund to be able to campaign in the political arena. This ballot is not about the union affiliating to any political party.

Do other unions have Political Funds?

73% of trade union members, who belong to a TUC affiliated trade union, belong to a union with a Political Fund. Unions with Political Funds range from the largest – UNISON, to the smallest – GULO. They represent a wide mix of professions, trades and industries and include general unions like the T&G, the GMB and AMICUS to the NASUWT, which represents members in the education sector.

Of the 31 unions in the UK which have a Political Fund, nine are not affiliated to the Labour Party. The decision whether a union wants to affiliate to a political party is subject to a separate, internal, democratic process. Of the unions in the UK with a Political Fund, one third are not affiliated to any political party.

By law, every trade union member has the right to opt out of the Political Fund. In Political Fund Review Ballots, all members, whether they pay the political levy or not, are entitled to vote in the ballot. The FBU is asking members who do not pay into the Political Fund to vote YES in the forthcoming review ballot, so that those members who want to pay into the Political Fund can continue to do so.

Why are we having a ballot?

Under a piece of legislation introduced by the Conservative Government in 1984, unions not only have to ballot their members to set up a Political Fund but also have to vote every ten years on whether or not to keep the Political Fund. This is the third round of ballots. The last two rounds were a massive success. We hope to get an even better result this time.

If I vote Yes does it mean I have to pay more?

No. In fact, every member has the right to opt out of paying into the Political Fund whenever they want. A Yes vote just means that the union keeps its Political Fund, so you keep your right to choose.

I don't pay the political levy. Why should I vote Yes?

Voting Yes means that those members who wish to pay into the Political Fund can continue to do so. It does not mean you begin to pay into the Political Fund. Every member of the union, political levy payers and non-payers alike, has a vote to decide whether or not to keep the Political Fund working for members. If you don't want to contribute to the Political Fund, you don't have to – you have the right to opt in or out of paying the levy whenever you want. It is important, though, that you vote and that you vote Yes, so that all members can benefit from the union's political campaigning.

Who can vote in this ballot?

All members of the union, whether they pay the political levy or not.

How do I vote?

The ballot paper will be sent to your

home unless you ask for it to be sent to another address. You should read the ballot paper and vote Yes if you agree to keep the union's Political Fund. It must be posted back to the Independent Scrutineer. A pre-paid return envelope will be included with the ballot paper.

What if my ballot paper doesn't arrive?

If you have not received a ballot paper three weeks before the close of the ballot, you should contact FBU Head Office. Have your membership details to hand.

Is it a secret ballot?

Yes, completely secret.

What happens if the union loses the ballot?

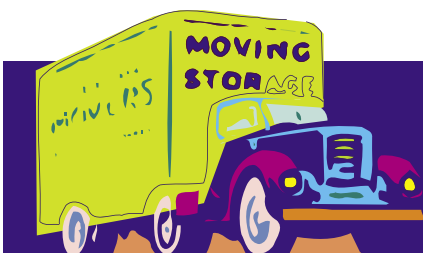
The union would lose the ability to campaign effectively on issues like better laws, better pensions, better public services and better health and safety laws.

I'm not interested in politics. Why should I vote Yes?

Because the law defines many ordinary campaigns (such as campaigns for better laws, better pensions, better public services and better health and safety laws) as having a 'political purpose'. A Yes vote keeps your right to choose whether or not to contribute to the Political Fund.

What can I do to help the campaign?

To help your union win a Yes vote, you can organise a seminar or briefing session for your workplace or union branch. Please contact Head Office for materials: leaflets and posters. Further information can be found on the TUCC website at www.vote-yes@org.uk.



ON THE MOVE?

Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.

OBITUARIES

Bill Faust

Bill Faust aged 36 was a firefighter for seven years, joining red watch at Whitechapel in 1997 straight from training. He had served several times as temporary crew commander.

Incidents he attended include the Brick Lane bombing in 1999 and a blaze in an east London flat which resulted in him being commended by Commissioner Ken Knight for his quick thinking and sensible actions in April 2003.

He was involved in community fire safety initiatives in the borough and was deeply committed to raising money for charity. He also found time to organise social events including a watch holiday to Portugal last May.

Bill leaves a wife, Michelle, son William six and twin daughters Mia and Pearl, two.



Adam Meere

Adam Meere aged 27 started at the London Fire Brigade training school in January 2004 and joined the Red Watch at Whitechapel in May.

He had attended St Patrick's RC School in Farnborough and then the Salesian



College, also in Farnborough. After leaving school he first worked for Asda and then joined Securicor.

Adam was a keen footballer and an avid Manchester United and England team follower.

His father Patrick, and his girlfriend Natalie's father, Paul, both served in the Fire Service.

At Southwark Training Centre Adam was known as a good team player who always gave 110 per cent in fulfilling his passion to become a firefighter.

Donations to the families of Bill Faust and Adam Meere should be sent to: HSBC, 20 Albert Embankment; Sort Code: 40-01-08; Account name: Bill Faust and Adam Meere Trust Fund; Account No: 01331647

Donations to the family of Richard Jenkins, who died in a suspicious blaze in Cardiff in May, can be sent to the Welsh Regional Office at: Units 38-40, Port Talbot Business Units, Addison Road, Port Talbot, SA12 6HZ; or paid directly to: Barclays Bank; Sort code: 20 18 27; Account Name: SWFS - Richard Jenkins Memorial Fund; Account Number: 20568783. Cheques should be made payable to: SWFS - Richard Jenkins Memorial Fund. Members can also make donations to the National Benevolent Fund.

LETTERS

BNP major threat

Dear Firefighter,

I read in the July/August issue that "the British National Party failed to make gains in the local and European elections." So, that's all right then, except actual results make really frightening reading.

The BNP actually increased its vote massively, obtaining more than 800,000. That was more than any other minority party including the Respect coalition, the SNP and Plaid Cymru.

Yet the presentation in *Firefighter* shows the BNP at the bottom. Not only was that misrepresenting the situation but also providing a false sense of security. If the elections had been held on a national proportional representation basis there is no doubt that the BNP would have made substantial gains.

Ignoring the growth or popularity of this party won't make it go away. The Union must be positive in its condemna-

tion of the BNPs odorous policies and bring the truth to the membership.

**Andy Dunlop,
Cambridgeshire Officer Section**

Airgun danger

Dear Firefighter,

I am the mother of an airgun attack victim. In September 2001 my son was shot in the mouth by a young child left alone with a loaded air rifle. Happily my son survived and I started a campaign to tighten legislation and educate young people about the consequences of gun misuse.

I am therefore saddened and dismayed to read that a recruit has been shot at whilst training and fail to understand why no further action is being taken*. Firefighters in my own area have been shot at and I am increasingly alarmed at other incidents involving firefighters around the country. Air weapons have killed, injured and paralysed people.

That police have not brought this case before the legal system sends a dangerous message to the perpetrators and potential perpetrators of airgun crime.

The Government is undertaking a consultation on firearm laws and the document can be located on the Home Office website. May I urge you to respond to the document even though the Home Secretary makes it clear in his introduction, no further measures are being considered for air weapons or replica guns. I feel it is important that incidents such as Ollerton are not trivialised.

**Linda Mitchell
Campaign for Airgun Control**

* A firefighter recruit in Ollerton, Notts, was recently hit in the face by an air rifle pellet as he was training in the Fire and Rescue Service's Dukeries complex. Police arrested a 17-year-old and confiscated weapons but he was not charged.

25 year badges



Pat Eccles of Springfield Branch receives his 25 year badge from Dermot Rooney, Regional Official, Region 2.



Alan Anderson, Red Watch at Polmadie Branch, is presented with his 25yr Badge by Kenny Ross, Scottish Regional Secretary



Jim Hutcheson, Red Watch at Polmadie Branch, is presented with his 25yr Badge from Kenny Ross (right), Scottish Regional Secretary



Tony Devlin of Springfield Branch receives his 25 year badge from Dermot Rooney



Billy Anderson, Terry Houston, Jim Quinn, David Lynch, David Scanlon, Terry Morrison, Martin Carlin, Joe Morrison, Tony Maguire, William Spence & Kieran Barr receiving their 25 year badges from Tony Maguire and Jimmy Quinn



Colin Scott Musselburgh, receiving his 25 year badge from Station Rep Jimmy Myles



Firefighter Roger Burton receiving his badge from Branch rep Stuart Cook



Firefighter Tom Dean receiving his badge from Branch rep Ian Finn



Station Officer, Tony Brennan receives his 25 year badge from ONC Rep, Kieran Barr



Firefighter Derek Hammond receiving his badge from Branch rep Stuart Cook



Leading Firefighter Terry Warwick receiving his badge from Region 10 E.C. member Keith Hanscombe